

Morocco

January 2021

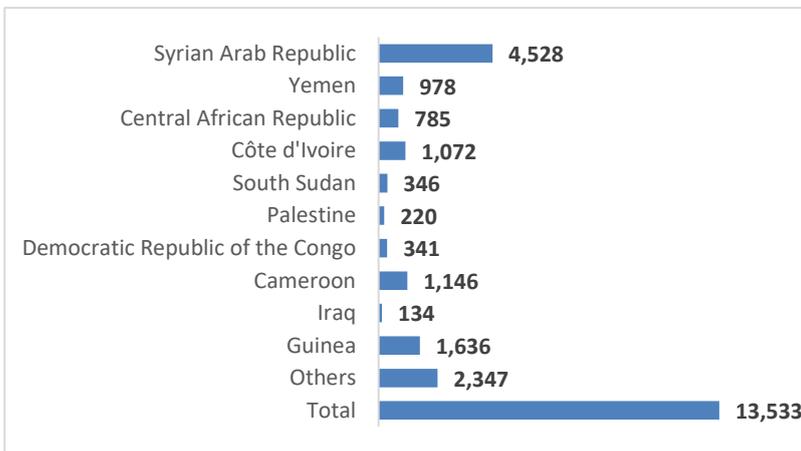
Morocco is both a transit and a host country with 13,533 refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR from more than 45 countries.

UNHCR ensures access to asylum procedures and protection of refugees in Morocco while working closely with Moroccan authorities under the framework of the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA).

With the progressive lifting of movement restriction measures, UNHCR and its partners have worked actively to make sure that their services continue to be accessible both physically and remotely for refugees in Morocco

UNHCR's people of concern

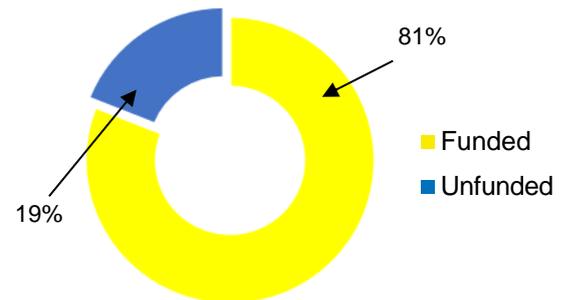
As of 31 December 2020: 8,138 refugees et 5,395 asylum seekers, a total of 13,533 people of concern



Funding needs in 2020 (As of 31 DECEMBER)

8.5 millions USD

Requested for UNHCR's Operation in Morocco



Refugees are located in **75 localities** across the kingdom.

UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

- 37 National Staff
- 7 International Staff
- 2 UNV
- 1 IV (Monaco)

Bureau :

- 1 Branch Office in Rabat



Mokhtar et Alâa, Syrian refugees in Rabat's medina.

Working with Partners

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is UNHCR's main government counterpart (MoFAIC). UNHCR also collaborates with key ministries, academic partners and other institutions.
- UNHCR is actively engaged with its partners : Fondation Orient-Occident (FOO), Association Marocaine de Planification Familiale (AMPF), Organisation Marocaine des Droits Humains (OMDH), Association Marocaine d'Appui à la Promotion de la Petite Entreprise (AMAPPE) and Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme (CNDH).
- In Oujda, Tangier and Casablanca, UNHCR has established Protection Working Groups (PWG) to better identify and protect refugees and asylum seekers. These groups are composed of civil society actors, institutional partners, regional human rights commissions and UN agencies.
- In 2020, UNHCR co-chaired with UNDP the UN Task Force on the Socio-Economic Impact of the COVID-19 crisis which developed with the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP) a related joint UN/Government of Morocco Policy Brief and set of recommendations.
- In a context of mixed movements, UNHCR co-chairs with IOM a joint Thematic Working Group on Migration and Asylum in support to the implementation of the two Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees ; and in full support to the National Policy on Migration and Asylum.
- In application of the whole-of-society and multi-partner approach called for by the Global Refugee Compact (2018) and subsequent Global Refugee Forum (2019), UNHCR is actively engaged and collaborating with a wide range of partners including refugees themselves, the media, regional and municipal authorities, civil society organization and members in the economic, social, cultural, religious and sport fields, the private sector, to improve the protection environment for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Alongside UN agencies, UNHCR is involved in the UNDAF (United Nations Development Assistance Framework) process as well as in the thematic groups on migration, gender, AIDS, youth, communication (UNCG) and monitoring and evaluation.

COVID-19 Context

In response to the COVID-19 situation and to fight its spread, the Government of Morocco has taken early and decisive public health measures since the onset of the crisis. These measures were accompanied by a national health response plan which included all individuals living in Morocco.

In support of, and in complement to, the measures taken by the Government of Morocco, **UNHCR rapidly adapted its operational posture to respond to the increasing specific protection and assistance needs of refugees and asylum seekers.** These populations, working mainly in the informal sector, were particularly affected by the crisis with little to no income sources, an exacerbation of pre-existing vulnerabilities and an increasing number of them in need of humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. Despite progressive loosening of movement restriction measures as of June, socio-economic impacts of the crisis continue to be felt deeply by refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco.

In line with public health measures that have evolved throughout 2020, UNHCR and its partners have worked actively to ensure refugees' and asylum seekers' continuous access to services both physically and remotely. Protection hotlines continue to be active and are an important point of contact for refugees and asylum seekers (over 2,800 counselling sessions conducted). Regarding the registration and Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures, these were maintained throughout the crisis, directly in UNHCR's office with prior appointment or remotely when conditions were suitable.

Main Activities

Protection

- **Registration & RSD:** Pending the establishment of a national asylum system, UNHCR continues to register new asylum-seekers and conduct refugee status determination (RSD). All positive cases are referred for verification to the *Bureau des Réfugiés et des Apatrides (BRA)* of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Inter-Ministerial Commission in charge of the regularization process in Rabat. UNHCR is present at Commission hearings and introduces the cases. Auditions by the Commission stopped at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. The issuance and renewal of BRA cards has since then resumed in December 2020. **In 2020, UNHCR adapted its registration and RSD procedures to ensure continuous access to asylum procedures while respecting preventive measures against COVID-19. In 2020, UNHCR registered 3,614 new asylum requests.**
- **Legal assistance:** UNHCR works with a private law firm (Cabinet Lemseguem) to provide legal aid services to refugees and asylum-seekers (e.g. for issuance of birth certificates, for filling complaints against physical assault and for representation before the Moroccan court). **From January to December 2020, nearly 120 people were able to benefit from such legal assistance.**
- **Emergency housing:** Through FOO, UNHCR has an emergency shelter and protection programme. Emergency housing is meant to meet immediate needs, while protection houses respond to longer-term needs. This programme benefits refugees and asylum-seekers with extreme vulnerabilities: unaccompanied minors, at-risk women, single mothers, victims of trafficking, SGBV survivors. In 2020, 44 refugees and asylum seekers with specific needs were accommodated by UNHCR's housing program and the FOO.
- **Protection of victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) :** A referral and support system is in place for survivors and people at increased risk of SGBV to ensure their access to healthcare, psycho-social support, legal assistance, as well as livelihoods through the services of UNHCR's partners, civil society and public services. Prevention is also carried out through awareness raising campaigns and community activities. As a response to the accumulated risk of violence during the COVID-19 crisis, UNHCR has a specifically dedicated phone number for women on its Protection Hotline. **Since the onset of the pandemic in March until December 2020, all lines have received some 800 calls from female refugees and asylum seekers, representing 30% of calls.** Their requests included housing assistance and financial assistance. There was an increase in the number of domestic violence cases.
- **Outreach and community-based activities:** UNHCR works in close collaboration with Protection Working Groups in Oujda, Tangier and Casablanca to identify and refer people with specific needs to adequate services. During the COVID-19 crisis, PWGs strengthened their coordination for the distribution of humanitarian assistance.
- **22 refugee community agents** of different nationalities share information among refugee communities across 7 localities in the Kingdom, relaying their needs and concerns to UNHCR and its partners. All these actions were strengthened during the crisis in coordination with UNHCR.

- **In response to the COVID-19 crisis**, the Refugee Protection Hotline, with its 6 numbers in 3 languages (Arabic, French and English) was immediately established and has allowed to respond to some 2,800 protection requests from refugees and asylum seekers since the 19th of March (one being specifically dedicated to women). Two additional phone numbers are assigned to registration and refugee status determination related matters. Finally, one additional phone number is specifically used for emergencies. Social media networks have also made it possible to respond to more than 430 requests from refugees and asylum seekers.
- In June 2020, the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP) conducted, in partnership with UNHCR a study with refugees in Morocco. This study aimed at assessing the economic, social and psychological impact of the COVID-19 crisis on refugees. Conducted with a sample of 600 refugee households, the study highlighted the socio-economic impact of the crisis: 9 out of 10 employed refugees had to stop working during lockdown. Additionally, data brings to the fore the importance of documentation: at the time of the study, only 55% of households had a valid residency permit.

Financial assistance for the most vulnerable

- UNHCR contributes to the cost of housing and food for the most vulnerable refugees (unaccompanied minors, single women, victims of gender-based violence and people with medical needs) through financial assistance based on assessments carried out with FOO. **In 2020, more than 2,500 individuals benefited from the financial assistance for the most vulnerable.**
- In response to the increasing number of testimonies of extreme precarity received from refugees, UNHCR has temporarily and exceptionally adapted its financial assistance programme. Vulnerable refugees benefiting from financial assistance (based on specific needs identified by UNHCR and FOO), received in April a combined payment for the months of April and May (2 months).
- Exceptionally and in a spirit of solidarity, every refugee registered with UNHCR, along with most vulnerable asylum seekers benefited from financial assistance in April, May, July, October and December. **More than 4,500 families benefited from financial assistance each month.** In order to implement these urgent measures, UNHCR had to reorganize the use of its resources.

Education

- **90% of refugee children have been enrolled in primary schools in 2020** thanks to UNHCR's education programme and close collaboration with FOO. Despite the challenging conditions, **the success rate for children in primary and secondary education has reached 90%.**
- Ensuring equitable schooling from a gender perspective remains one of UNHCR's priorities. **In Morocco, 48% of refugee children enrolled in schools are girls.**
- Due to the COVID-19 crisis, classes have been suspended from the 16th of March until the month of September, in all kindergartens, educational and vocational training institutions, public and private universities. The Ministry of National Education (NEM) has set up various tools to ensure remote learning education as an alternative. **73% of enrolled children have taken online classes during lockdown.** As remedial classes were suspended from March to September, children's academic support was provided by refugee students from the DAFI program.
- During the month of August, UNHCR and its partners actively promoted the importance of schooling for refugee children and helped parents prepare the "back to school" period. Most households have opted for children to go back to school in-person rather than distance learning. A conditional cash assistance for education to cover school supplies has been distributed. For the 2020-2021 school year, 888 children are enrolled at primary level, and 221 at secondary level.
- **In 2020, some 1,300 families received monthly cash assistance** to support their children's

education at primary and secondary level. In addition, **74 refugees in Morocco are beneficiaries of the DAFI programme.**

Health

- Through its partner *Association Marocaine de Planification Familiale (AMPF)*, UNHCR facilitates the referral of refugees to public primary health care centers in which services are delivered free of charge. Pending the extension of the national medical insurance system (RAMED) to refugees, UNHCR assists with refugees' access to specialized health care services, including expenses related to medication, laboratory tests and specialized medical treatments.
- In 2020, the health program assisted **over 5,000 refugees**. During the COVID-19 crisis, UNHCR and its medical partner adapted their services to ensure continuous access to healthcare services. This included the set-up of medical hotlines for remote consultations. Refugees with chronic illnesses were supplied with medicines in AMFP's centers or directly at their homes. **In total, 6,100 primary consultations were carried out, as well as 8,641 specialized medical consultations.**
- To respond to the emergency and psychological assistance requests that increased rapidly from the onset of the pandemic, FOO created a remote psychological support cell. The team was able to record over 700 calls from refugees and asylum seekers.
- UNHCR signed a partnership agreement on the 20th of May 2020 with **the National Council of Doctors (CNOM)** to facilitate access to specialized healthcare, including mental health, for refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco. 44 refugees were able to benefit from specialized consultations, medical and surgical interventions.

Livelihood and self-reliance

- With the *Association Marocaine d'Appui à la Promotion de la Petite Entreprise (AMAPPE)*, UNHCR supports refugees' enrolment in vocational trainings, the creation of income generating activities through microfinancing and job placement. The creation of micro-enterprises for the benefit of refugees continued in 2020 with the involvement of two state partners, namely *l'Agence Nationale de la Promotion de l'Emploi et des Compétences (ANAPEC)* and *l'Office de Développement de la Coopération (ODCO)*.
- In 2020, **581** refugees were received for orientation and counseling sessions in-person and remotely. In 2020, 75 income-generating activities (IGAs) for the benefit of 80 refugees - including 4 *sociétés à responsabilité limitée* (SARLs) and 3 auto-entrepreneur status were created and 97 IGAs were financially supported to recover from the COVID-19 crisis. A total of 873 micro-projects have been created since 2007.
- **Private sector:** since 2016, **213 refugees have been placed in enterprises by UNHCR and AMAPPE** across the country, including **48** in 2020. In 2020, **10** new companies recruited one or more refugees, for a total of **49** different businesses since the start of the employability program. **91% of refugees lost their source of income following the COVID-19 crisis.**

Capacity building and sensitization

- Capacity building is a key element of UNHCR's strategy to support the Moroccan authorities and civil society in the implementation of a fair and efficient asylum policy. UNHCR organizes on a regular basis workshops on the protection of refugees in a context of mixed migration flows and collaborates with the National Council on Human Rights (CNDH) to strengthen civil society's asylum-related capacities. **Several training courses were held by UNHCR** in various locations in Morocco for judges (Higher Institute of the Judiciary), lawyers, legal clinics, university students, Royal Gendarmerie, National Police as well as civil society organizations and the Protection Working Groups in Oujda, Tangier and Casablanca.

Durable Solutions

- UNHCR implements a resettlement programme for refugees with specific protection needs. In 2019, 102 refugees were resettled to third countries (Canada, USA, Sweden and France). Due to the COVID-19 situation and the closure of borders, only 21 refugees were resettled during the year 2020. These refugees went to the United States, Sweden and Spain.
- UNHCR is also running a program for complementary pathways to third countries. In 2020, some refugees had the opportunity to be resettled in several European countries including a student in Belgium and five refugees (including three children) from family reunion in France, Belgium, and in Germany.

Donors

UNHCR is grateful for the generous contributions received in 2020 by the European Union, Switzerland, the United States of America, Italy, Japan, Monaco, United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, Germany and France

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Sweden | Netherlands | Norway | Denmark | United Kingdom | Germany | Private donors Spain | Switzerland | Private donors Republic of Korea | Canada | United States | Finland | Ireland | Private donors Australia | Private donors Germany | Private donors Japan

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